

PSALMS

songs to make your heart sing

An - cient of Days, Pa - vil - ions of
thun - der - clouds form, And dark is the
scends to the plain, And sweet - ly do
firm to the end; Our Mak - er, De

Homegroup Discussion Guide

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Thanks for Being Part of a Homegroup

At Central, we believe that disciples grow in circles, not rows. By that we mean that we grow most as believers when we sit together around God's word, discussing the real issues of life as a follower of Jesus.

Central homegroups are part of the DNA of our church. Sunday services are important, but in homegroups there is greater opportunity for learning together, serving together, caring together, praying together and doing life together. God's people are not saved into isolation, but into a community and a great expression of that community is in homegroups.

Making the Most of Your Homegroup Time

Anything worth doing is worth doing well. That's why we ask that you treat your homegroup as an important part of the rhythm of your weekly life. There are a few things you can do so that you get the most benefit out of the group and so that you are a benefit and a blessing to the group.

- Be There:** Your presence encourages others. It means you are not only committed to the group, but to the other members of the group. Being inconsistent sends a negative message to everyone else.
- Prayer:** Pray for the people in your group, especially your group leader.
- Prepare:** Read any parts of the Bible that your leader suggests, do any homework that comes out of the study. It will not be onerous and you will benefit from it.
- Care:** Be willing to give of yourself to the others in your group. The Bible says, "Love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Why Do the Same Study?

At Central Church all homegroups study the same passage or topic that was preached at the Sunday church service. What are the advantages of doing studies this way?

- Unity: Doing the same study means all across the church we are learning the same things at the same time. It can provide topics of conversation across the whole church.
- Growth: People learn better when they hear things more than once. People learn better when they hear things more than once. Marketing people know this. That is why you see the same commercials on TV over and over again. But it is true. Most people will only remember one or two points from a Sunday sermon (and they are usually the stories that are told as illustrations). People learn best when given the opportunity to talk over the subject matter. By hearing the sermon on Sunday and then being involved in a homegroup discussion during the week, you will find the message of God's Word is sown more deeply into your heart and mind.
- Relevance: By preparing our own studies, we can be specific about issues that impact all of us in our time and place. Most group study materials are from America or were written 10 or 20 years ago and speak to issues of another place or time. You will find that the studies we prepare will be practical and relevant in Ipswich, today.

About the Psalms

Christopher Ash explains the following about the Psalms

Singing with the choir

Imagine you are seated in a great concert hall. In the middle of the stage is Jesus Christ, the conductor and song-leader of the people of God. Behind him stands a huge choir; his church in every age. This choir sings the psalms as the songs of Jesus, led by Jesus, shaped by Jesus, guided and taught by Jesus. What do you need to do to join in? You need to understand the words of the psalms. You need to get hold of the "tune" of the psalms, by which I mean the emotions and affections they convey. You need to grasp what commitment will be required of you if you are to join the choir of Jesus and join in, for every psalm asks of us some commitment. Finally you need to get up out of your seat in the audience and join the choir!

Who wrote the Psalms and why?

The Psalms were written by a great variety of people over a long period of Old Testament history. The earliest Psalm whose period we know is one by Moses (Ps 90 from around the time of the Exodus). King David, centuries after Moses, was the pre-eminent psalmist, which is why the umbrella headline for the Psalter is "the Psalms of David"; about half the psalms have his name at the top. From the day the Spirit of God came upon him, when he was anointed by Samuel the prophet, he began to sing songs that were inspired by the Spirit of the anointed king who was yet to come (see, for example, 2 Sam:22, which became Psalm 18).

It was King David who made provision for societies of musicians who wrote and led Israel in psalms at the temple. From then on, right through the period of Israel's kings, through the exile in Babylon and beyond, Spirit-inspired poets wrote psalms. Many come from subsequent generations of the song-writing societies founded by David (for instance, the psalms headed "of Asaph"); many others are anonymous. But whether named or anonymous, these psalmists "prophesied" (see 1 Chronicles 25:1-3); that is, they wrote and sang by the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of the Christ who was to come (1 Peter 1:10-12). We do not know quite how or when the Psalms were arranged, by inspiration of the Spirit of God, into their present order. We know that the last psalms were written no earlier than the exile in Babylon (see, for instance, Psalms 74 and 137). It seems likely that Books 1 and 2 were the earliest collection, that Book 3 was put together during or after the exile, and that books 4 and 5 were arranged last of all. The study of the arrangement of the Psalms is a hot topic in biblical scholarship.

God's people sang these songs in Israel, in exile, and when they returned to the land, and were still doing so when Jesus walked in Judea. The Lord Jesus and the New Testament writers made much use of the Psalms. The Psalms are the God-given words by which the Lord Jesus Christ leads his church in praying to and praising the Father.

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Come Learn to pray and feel

In the Psalms we learn to **pray** and we learn to **feel** (something we've lost since the charismatic movement made us wary of our feelings). In the Psalms we learn to pray corporately, with the church of Christ in every age. We learn to pray Christocentrically, with our prayers led by Jesus Christ, by whose Spirit we pray them. And we learn to pray empathetically, as we identify with the wider church and focus less on our individualistic and often introspective concerns. This will involve a massive paradigm shift for many of us, especially those of us nurtured in individualistic Western cultures, where the Christian life is a "me and God" thing, with the emphasis on "me". Learning to sing and pray the Psalms will be a challenging affair, an unsettling experience, and yet a discipline that transforms us into the image of God's Son, the Lord Jesus, whose own prayer life was shaped by these wonderful poems.

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God is King

Psalm 2

For Starters

What do you think about the royals? Love them? Sick of them? Not interested?

In the course of world history, has the rule of kings and queens over nations or tribes been positive? When has it been positive and when has it not been positive?

Psalm 2 is a royal Psalm. In it we find two very different types of kings. One type stands opposed to God. The other is God's anointed king who rules over all. But there can be only one king. As you read this Psalm, think not about those who rule nations, but about how you put yourself in the position of king and just how well that's working out.

From the Word

Psalm 2 was probably used as a Coronation Song for the kings of Israel. It breaks neatly into 4 sections or stanzas. Get a feel for this structure by having different people read each section:

- (1) verses 1 to 3
- (2) verses 4 to 6
- (3) verses 7 to 9
- (4) verses 10 to 12

1. Whose voice do we hear in each stanza?

2. The first section or scene (verses 1 to 3) shows us the human heart standing against God. Why is this described as vain?

3. Who is the Lord's 'anointed' mentioned in verse 2?

4. In verses 4 to 6 we see God's emotional response. Where is God and what does he make of the plotting and raging of the powerful ones on earth?

5. What action has God taken (verse 6)?

6. In verses 7 to 9 we hear the words of the Lord's anointed one. What in these verses tell us that the scope of the Psalm reaches beyond any king of Israel?

7. The Psalm highlights the power of the Anointed One to dash to pieces all who stand against him. But it ends with words of grace. What warning and call to action is given?

8. What does it mean to 'kiss the son'?

For Discussion

9. Where do we see people (even us) wanting to be free from what they see as God's 'bonds' or 'cords'?

10. The New Testament writers clearly saw this Psalm fulfilled in Christ (eg. Acts 4:24-27, 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, 5:5). How did God install Jesus as his king in Zion?

11. In what areas of life do you find it hardest to submit fully to Jesus?

For Prayer

Start by paying homage to Jesus as King.

Ask God to help you live fully submitted to Him.

Pray that in our world that mocks God, we will declare his majesty and his rule with courage.

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SERMON NOTES



God is Holy

Psalm 5

For Starters

When you pray, what elements of God's character are foremost in your mind?

In Psalm 5, David comes to God in prayer and God's holiness is forefront in his mind. As we hear David pray, it is helpful to see how being familiar with the fullness of God's character can enrich our prayers.



From the Word

Read Psalm 5

1. As you reflect on verses 1 to 3, how would you describe David's emotional state?
2. David affirms that God is holy - He does not delight in wickedness (verse 4). Is this good news or bad news as far as David is concerned?
3. How can we reconcile God's love with the statement in verse 5 that God hates sinners?
4. David knows that evil may not dwell with God, but how is it that David can enter God's house (verse 7)?
5. Our modern ears often struggle with the kind of prayer we find in verses 9 and 10. When David calls for evil people to bear their own guilt and be cast out, what is his main concern?
6. What difference is evident in the people referred to in verse 11?

For Discussion

7. It seems that verse 3 expresses a usual routine of morning prayer to God. What is your routine for prayer?

8. Is it ok to groan and cry to God, imploring him to hear your prayers?

9. Go back to verse 4 and meditate on the words "God does not delight in sin." Can you insert your name instead of God's? Where is this not true of you?

10. Review the whole Psalm and identify particular aspects of God's character that David brings up. Then reflect on your answer to the For Starters question and discuss the similarities and differences.

11. How could this study of Psalm 5 enrich the way you pray?

For Prayer

Start by honouring God for his character, especially his holiness and his loving kindness.

Give thanks that through the Lord Jesus Christ you can enter God's presence because your guilt is taken away.

Ask God to lead you in his righteousness.

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MY SERMON NOTES



God is Good

Psalm 34

For Starters

Is there a time that God has rescued you? Maybe from a bad situation, accident, or embarrassment?

Today we are going to look at a story of how God rescued David. After David is rescued he writes this beautiful Psalm to the Lord and to the people of God. He invites them to draw nearer to God and to trust him. David tells them how God rescued him and he will rescue them too.

From the Word

1 Samuel 21 gives the historical setting for this Psalm. Go to that chapter and summarise what happened.

Now read Psalm 34.

1. How does David respond to this experience (verses 1-7)?
2. As you look at verses 8-22, who are the righteous ones or the blessed?
3. What does David mean when he says,
 - A) Magnify the Lord?
 - B) Taste and see that God is good?
 - C) Fear the Lord?
4. What are the reasons that we can trust and fear God?
5. What about in times of affliction? How does this Psalm address the question of suffering for God's people?
6. How does the gospel shine through Psalm 34?

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MY SERMON NOTES



God Sees

Psalm 39

For Starters

Rate from 1-10 how much these situations make your blood boil, then share your answers:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being cut off in traffic | <input type="checkbox"/> Cracked screen on your phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with >12 items in the express lane | <input type="checkbox"/> Being unfriended on Facebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being blamed for another's mistake | <input type="checkbox"/> Politicians' salaries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your stuff being used without permission | <input type="checkbox"/> Lost your car keys |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone forgot your birthday | <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect use of apostrophes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No RSVP to your invitation | <input type="checkbox"/> Reality TV |

When you get angry, are you a boiler or a blurter?

The flavour of Psalm 39

If you reverse engineer this Psalm, you start to get a picture of a situation. It seems like David has started out with the grandest of intentions: "I said, 'I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue'" (v1). Was his reputation being tarnished? Were things not going his way? We don't know, but David's commitment to silence only succeeded in causing him to internally combust to the point where he says "I spoke with my tongue" (v3). Presumably it didn't go well. The rest of the Psalm is David asking the God who sees to help him see things with the right perspective...

From the Word

Read Psalm 39

Grand Intentions - verses 1-3

1. Which words or phrases indicate the fact that the challenge David faces is to do with holding his tongue?
2. We don't know what made it so hard for David to keep silent, but we do know something happened to David as he doggedly held onto his silence. What was it? What eventuated?
3. Did David pass or fail in his attempt to not sin with his mouth?

The Aftermath - verses 4-6

4. It's always easy after the fact to be wise. What kind of perspective is David asking God for, and what difference would having that perspective make?

The Other Side of Denial - verses 7-13

5. What's David asking for and why?

6. Verse 9 is the second time David talks about being silent. How is this different from verse 2?
7. Read 1 Peter 2:23. What perspective helped Jesus stay silent where David couldn't?

For Discussion

The Root and the Fruit

8. Clearly for David, his lips weren't the problem. There was something going on in his heart that meant he couldn't do what Jesus did - i.e. entrust himself to God and keep quiet. **Check your heart** - what's going on in your heart when your blood's boiling about something?
9. Do you think God sees and knows what's happening to you? How does that help?
10. David sees a clear connection between his suffering and God's discipline. How easy is that for us to do? How do we discern between suffering that comes from living in a broken world, and suffering that comes from discipline?

For Prayer

Pray that we would entrust ourselves to the God who sees all and who will judge justly.

Pray for the self-control to stay silent when we're tempted to speak out in anger.

Pray for repentant hearts that accept God's discipline for our good.

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God is Gracious

Psalm 51

For Starters

Share a time from your childhood when you were caught out and what your inclination was to deal with being exposed? (e.g. covered up, pointed the finger at others, blamed your circumstances.)

David was exposed (read 2 Samuel 12:1-14 for context for this Psalm) and interestingly his response doesn't include any hiding, pointing or mention of "But..." He has nothing in himself to appeal to, so his first words are to make an appeal based on God's merciful character.

From the Word

Read Psalm 51.

1. How is sin defined 3 ways in this Psalm?
2. What are the dimensions of sin highlighted in this passage and why must we take our sin so seriously?
3. How was sin revealed to David and why is this method sometimes necessary?
4. How does David appeal to God as his priest, judge and creator?
5. The first half of the Psalm is about repentance and a plea for pardon. What more is David seeking?
6. In addition to being forgiven, what are the results of genuine confession before God?
7. What sacrifice delights God; a broken and contrite heart (v17), a burnt bull (v19) or both? Why is our confession so important?

For Discussion

8. This is not just a personal Psalm of David but a Psalm for Israel to sing together - "to the choirmaster" - and is therefore a Psalm for us all. David was public about his failure and also public about his forgiveness. Discuss how public we should be about our struggle with sin and our confession of sin.

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9. How has this Psalm helped you to either understand the seriousness of your sin (and how you may have been excusing, belittling or self-justifying your sin against a Holy God) AND/OR how has this Psalm helped you to believe that you really can be forgiven for that sin you have buried so deeply and for so long?

10. What song will your heart sing in response to this Psalm?

For Prayer

Sing that song now through prayers of repentance and praise (that confession of sin is only ever met with His grace, that the wisdom of the cross has displayed both his just and merciful nature; that sin was judged and sinners were saved through Christ's work on the cross.)

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MY SERMON NOTES



God Satisfies

Psalm 63

For Starters

Discuss times in your life when you've been most satisfied.

It's not usually an action itself that satisfies us but how much that action meets one of our needs. King David was in the wilderness, most likely on the run from his son Absalom (2 Sam 15-17) when he wrote Psalm 63 and forms the context for this passage. So as you read, don't picture David sitting in the comforts of his throne but rather exiled in the wilderness, physically and spiritually.

From the Word

Read Psalm 63

1. Who exactly is David seeking and what language does he use to describe it (verse 1)?
2. Despite currently being in the wilderness, what had David already 'tasted' of God (verse 2)?
3. The next 5 verses contain aspects of David's relationship with God. Have a go at filling out the following table with as many as you can find (verses 3-8).

Language David uses to describe God	Language David uses to describe his response

4. How would you summarise why David seeks God? How is that different to what we expect from religion?
5. How does David show his trust in God despite his current situation (verses 9-10)?
6. How can you tell (verse 11)?

For Discussion

7. Where are you most dissatisfied with life right now? What do you feel burdens and occupies your heart the most?

8. Why is it often the hardest to seek God when we are experiencing the most pain?

9. God's love was enough to satisfy David and trigger his worship of God despite his circumstance. How has God shown his love for you now?

10. What song should this Psalm cause your heart to sing?

11. What can stop you from singing the right tune?

For Prayer

Thank God that all our needs are met in Jesus.

Ask forgiveness for times when we are not satisfied in him but ask that he may renew our spirits to seek him at all times.

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MY SERMON NOTES



God is Better

Psalm 84

For Starters

Background

Psalm 84 was composed by the Sons of Korah for God's people to sing while on a journey to Jerusalem to worship God. The Sons of Korah were appointed by King David to serve in music ministry in God's house. Travellers journeying there sang together to stir up joyful anticipation about entering God's presence and humble awe at being included in God's family.

Make a quick list of the car stickers you've seen that start with the words - "I'd rather be...."

What are these people trying to communicate?

From the Word

Read Psalm 84:1-3

1. Where would the Psalmist rather be and why?
2. The Psalmist is calling for people to respond with their whole bodies. Which parts get a special mention here?
3. What's the point of the reference to the sparrow?

Read Psalm 84:4-7

4. Blessed and blessed. Who are those who are blessed?
 - a.
 - b.
5. If the "place to be" in Old Testament times is the temple, where would it be for God's people today? (Read Romans 8.1-4)
6. Baca is unknown as a place in Israel. However, the word carries the meaning of something dry and lifeless. What is this psalm/song saying if this is the case?

You might think it's funny for the people of Israel to be singing a song about how great it is to be at the temple, but that's exactly what we do as we sing about being "in Christ".

Every Promise

Every promise of our God
Finds its 'yes' in his own Son
Blessings to his people come
In abundance through the One

CHORUS

In Christ God's glory is revealed
His grace, his faithfulness is shown
And so we live in certain hope
The God of Truth our fortress strong

As foretold the servant came
Sacrificed to rid our shame
Promised Saviour, Lamb of God
Full atonement by his blood.

CHORUS

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Plainsong Music

Read Psalm 84:8-12

7. Verses 11 and 12 give us the reasons the psalmist is so convinced about the "better place" his people are in. What's the rationale?

For Discussion

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

8. What's your most natural 'happy place'? i.e. where would you rather be?
9. How do you reconcile verse 11 with the difficulties of life?
10. What song will your heart sing in response to this Psalm?

For Prayer

Pray the truth of this Psalm would impact practical areas of your life.

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MY SERMON NOTES



God is Near

Psalm 139

For Starters

Share with the group a time when you have felt alone or isolated? Possibly express how the last couple of months has impacted you in this area?

During those seasons of life, did you ever feel distant from God?

Our journey through life may bring moments of highs when we feel unstoppable or shortcomings which bring feelings of desertion, unconnectedness and loneliness. What is more tragic for us is believing God has abandoned us in these times. Thankfully God remains with us in all circumstances and we can be encouraged by His word as we reflect on Psalm 139.

From the Word

Read Psalm 139

1. In what ways does God know us intimately? (verses 1-5)
2. The saying, "no one knows you better than yourself" is generally true, but what does verse 6 reveal about God? What does it reveal about ourselves?
3. Where can we go without God? What does this section imply about God? (verses 7-10)
4. Verses 11-12 look to be metaphorical but what do you believe David is communicating? (refer to verses 7-10)
5. What is David's attitude towards God in verses 17-18? Furthermore, what is encouraging every morning as we wake up?
6. Read verses 19-22 and Psalm 7:3-5. Is David contradicting himself? Is David contradicting Jesus when Jesus commands to love your enemies (Matt 5:44)?
7. What does David mean when he uses strong language like "slay the wicked" and "I hate them with complete hatred" (ESV)? (verses 19; 22)
8. The beginning of Psalm 139 has revealed an intimate relationship with God's people, how does this section reflect that intimate relationship?

9. David is quite self-reflective in verse 23-24, what does this reveal about David and man? Alternatively, what does it reveal about God?

For Discussion

10. Has there been a time when you have asked God to search you and know your heart? Are there reasons for not asking?
11. It is humbling to know God has made us. Together read verses 13-14. What does this mean for you? Does your soul know it well? Share with the group how this leads you to praise God.
12. How do you respond to sin around you? More importantly, how do you respond to your own sin?
13. What song will your heart sing in response to this Psalm?

For Prayer

What has always encouraged the church is to pray through the Psalms. At the beginning of your prayer time, take the time to pray through Psalm 139.

Praise and give glory to God as the all-knowing, all powerful and Holy God.

Highlight the times when you've struggled and sought God's providence and grace.

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MY SERMON NOTES



God is Praiseworthy

Psalm 145

For Starters

What makes you so happy you could do it all day, every day, forever?

Psalm 145 is the last of the psalms of David and it introduces the hymns of praise that conclude the book. The Psalms are full of all kinds of different expressions of human emotions such as lament, sorrow, pain and sin. However Psalm 145 (which many believe to be written at the end of David's life) is a song of praise to God. David has not had an easy life (as evidenced in the Psalms), but the way he finishes off is in worship. So let's join David as he leads us in worship of our great God.

From the Word

1. When is David praising God? (verses 1-2)
2. Why does David praise God and how many different ways does David express this? (Note: It's a VERY long list!)
3. What is one of the purposes of praising God verses 4-7?
4. What evidence does David give for the declaration in verses 8-9?
5. How is this Psalm (in particular, verse 13) a comfort in the chaos of our world?

For Discussion

6. Why does praise matter?
7. How does David's call to praise make you feel?

8. What if you don't feel like praising God and doubt the truths in this Psalm? How can we cultivate a posture of praise if it's not coming easily?

You may be excited and full of joy at this call to worship, or maybe you feel overwhelmed and inadequate – asking yourself: “how can I maintain this level of worship”? Well, we can't! However, we must remember that in this Psalm, David – the King of Israel is leading his people in worship. He does this imperfectly (think Bathsheba and the murder of her husband), and we know only one can worship God the Father perfectly, that is Jesus. Christopher Ash puts it like this.

“Still today, Jesus the King praises God the Father-King. The King, praises the King. Or, to put it more accurately, the divine-human King leads his people in praise of God the Father-King. This is such a relief to us. Having feared that we may be asked to dredge out of our reluctant hearts a praise of which we are not capable, we learn now that we not being asked to take the microphone to lead the praise: no, we are invited to join the choir of Jesus and to join in the praise that he is already leading.”

9. What helps you/leads you to praise God?
10. How have you personally experienced verses 8-9?
11. What do you think it looks like to live a life of worship?

For Prayer

Use the words of this Psalm to praise God for his greatness and goodness. Pray that we would live lives of praise – making the wonderful deeds of our great God known to the world around us, in particular the gospel. Pray that in the times we doubt and don't feel like praising God that he would carry us and remind us of his promises to hold us fast through life's struggles.

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